

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

MIDNITE MINE **Wellpinit, Washington**



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

June 2001

Site Update

EPA would like to take this opportunity to let the community know about current and upcoming work at the Midnite Mine site. Approximately 30 people attended our last public meeting, held in January 2001 in Wellpinit. We plan to hold another meeting later this summer.

Sampling Data Will Be Available in July

The chemical results from EPA's fall 2000 sampling will be available this July. Over the last several months, the laboratories have reported results for metals and radionuclides, including radium and uranium. Samples of soil and sediment were collected from the mined area, areas near the mine, and mine drainages where wind or water may have carried site contaminants. Areas near the site were also sampled; results will help determine the background contaminant levels that site conditions should be compared to.

The gravel haul roads were also sampled, and a few additional sampling wells were installed on and near the mined area. Sampling results from these wells will be used to answer remaining questions about groundwater flow. EPA also put out measuring devices to assess the radon in the air and emerging from the ground at the site.

This sampling is part of EPA's Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS), which will help us understand where the contamination is and what risks it may pose to people and the environment. EPA plans to hold a public meeting later this summer in Wellpinit to talk about the initial sampling results, address community questions, and describe the plan for additional work. Stay tuned for more information.

Upcoming Road Work Will Not Pose Health Risks

In June, county workers will be doing road construction on the easternmost six-mile portion of the Ford-Wellpinit Road. The work is expected to start in the middle of June and end by Labor Day. Expect some traffic delays, due to lane closures and detours. EPA and the Stevens County Public Works coordinated with the Spokane Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to ensure that areas where ore has spilled from haul trucks onto the roadside will not be disturbed. The areas identified by EPA in its 1999 survey are outside the zone where road work and earthmoving is planned.

Funding News and Next Steps for Planning Cleanup

EPA has been successful in obtaining funding for the sampling completed in fall 1999 and spring 2000. However, the complexity of the site, combined with limited funding for Superfund projects nationwide, has meant that funding for the sampling needed to complete the RI/FS is uncertain at this point. Therefore, reaching a cleanup decision will take longer than anticipated.

To finish the study, we anticipate that some additional soil samples may be needed, as well as additional radon measurements. Results from this

final sampling should be sufficient to support completion of the RI/FS, which will include an assessment of ecological and human health risk, modeling of groundwater flow, and an evaluation of alternatives for cleanup at the mine.

Our plans call for completing this work this summer, provided we receive funding.

Web Page Updated

We recently updated the Midnite Mine web page and would like your feedback. We hope that the new format makes information easier to locate. Current technical and community involvement documents are now posted on the site, as well as e-mail links to various parties involved with the site. We will be updating the page as new site information is released, and will be adding site photographs and maps. To reach the Midnite page, go to the EPA Region 10 web page at www.epa.gov/r10/earth. Click on "Index," then click on "M." Please send comments on the web page or community involvement activities to Debra Packard at 1-800-424-4372, extension 0247, or e-mail packard.debra@epa.gov.

About the RI/FS Process

Before a site can be cleaned up or reclaimed, it is important to identify where the contamination is and what risks it may pose to human health and the environment. Rocks in the Midnite Mine area contain natural radioactive minerals and metals. Sulfides in some rocks at the site have been exposed by mining. These sulfides react with oxygen, causing water, such as rain or snow-melt, to acidify when it comes in contact with them. The acidic water can then pick up heavy metals from the mineralized rocks and carry them into creeks and groundwater. Wind and water passing through the site can also carry uranium and other radioactive minerals off-site.

EPA's study, called a "Remedial Investigation" (RI), will address questions like:

- What are the health concerns for people who live, work, or hunt at or near the site?
- What are the effects of metals and acidity in the streams on fish and insects?
- How is the water affected by contaminants as it flows underground and over the surface of the mined area?
- What controls might prevent clean water from entering the mined area and keep contaminated water from getting out?

Once site information is gathered, EPA will evaluate various cleanup options in a "Feasibility Study" (FS). The cleanup options will be evaluated using criteria that include overall protection of human health and the environment, cost, and community acceptance. EPA will then recommend a cleanup option and ask the community to comment. After EPA considers all comments and selects a final cleanup plan, it will be designed and built. At sites like Midnite Mine, the study, evaluation, decision, and cleanup can take six to ten years.

Site Background

Midnite Mine is an inactive open-pit uranium mine eight miles northwest of Wellpinit, Washington, on the Spokane Tribe Reservation. Between 1951 and 1981, Dawn Mining company mined for uranium ore at Midnite Mine. Waste rock and piles of ore and protore (lower grade ore) remain on the site. Two pits remain open and contain water; the larger, more contaminated pit is fenced to prevent access. Since 1992, Dawn has been required to collect contaminated water flowing from the mined areas. The water is treated on-site to remove contamination and is discharged to a surface drainage that leads to Blue Creek. Sludge from the water treatment is transported by truck to Dawn's mill, processed to extract uranium, and disposed of in the lined tailings disposal pond at the mill. While this effort has helped reduce

the amount of contaminated water leaving the site, a more effective and permanent control is needed to protect human health and the environment.

In April 1998, EPA did a study called an "Expanded Site Investigation," which confirmed elevated levels of metals and radionuclides at many on-site areas. In February 1999, EPA proposed Midnite Mine to the Superfund National Priorities List of sites eligible for

federal cleanup funds, and it was listed in May 2000.

The EPA RI/FS process is currently underway. In fall 1999, fifty-two monitoring wells were installed around the mine. Sampling results from these wells are helping us to understand groundwater flow direction and how the water reacts with chemicals in the rocks. EPA also conducted a radiation survey of potential ore spills along the Ford-Wellpinit Road.

How to Contact Us

If you have concerns or questions about the site, please contact one of the following people:

EPA

Elly Hale, Project Manager, (206) 553-1215
hale.ellie@epa.gov

Debra Packard, Community Involvement Coordinator, (206) 553-0247
packard.debra@epa.gov

EPA staff can be reached toll-free at 1-800-424-4372.

Spokane Tribe

Last year, the tribe hired **Randy Connolly** to coordinate EPA-tribe communications on Midnite Mine and two other Superfund projects of interest to the tribe. Randy can be reached at the Tribal Natural Resources Department, at **(509) 258-7709**.

Key site documents are available to review at the following locations:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Seventh Floor Records Center
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101
Tel: (206) 553-4494

and The Spokane Tribal Natural Resources office
on Ford-Wellpinit Road
P.O. Box 100
Wellpinit, WA 99040
Tel: (509) 258-9042

Region 10 web page:
<http://www.epa.gov/r10/earth>

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by calling 1-800-424-4372.



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Region 10 (ECO-081)
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle WA 98101

SUPERFUND FACT SHEET
MIDNITE MINE
Wellpinit, Washington